15 May 1953

year. It seems to be a generally accepted fact that you must be classed with
the “great preachers” of our day.

You have my continual prayers in all of your endeavors.

Sincerely yours,

AHLd. MLKP-MBU: Box 116.

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

“A Comparison and Evaluation of the
Theology of Luther with That of Calvin”

15 May 1953
[Boston, Mass.]

King submitted versions of this essay for two courses at Boston: Edwin Prince
Booth’s Seminar in Historical Theology and L. Harold DeWolf’s History of
Christian Doctrine.1 In this version, written for DeWolf; King differs with Luther
and Calvin’s undue emphasis on the sovereignty of God, arguing that “God is first
and foremost an all loving Father.” DeWolf graded the paper “A. Very good” but
added: “awkwardly worded title.”

Within the brief compass of this paper it would be
impossible to give an adequately comprehensive treat-
ment of so extensive a theme as a comparison and
evaluation of the theology of Luther with that of Cal-
vin; however, the most salient feature of these sys-
tems of theology may at least be cursorily described.2

Certainly the significance of these two great person-
alities cannot be exaggerated. Both historians and the-
ologians would admit this fact. Even those of us who
do not subscribe to many of their views are forced to

1. Edwin Prince Booth (1898–1969) received his A.B. in 1919 from Allegheny College and
his S.T.B. in 1922 and his Ph.D. in 1929 from Boston University. He was ordained a Methodist
minister in 1922 and thereafter served as pastor of the Community Church in Islington, Massa-
chusetts. In 1924 Booth joined Boston University’s faculty as an instructor in church history,
becoming a professor the following year. He remained at Boston until his death. His publications
included Martin Luther: Oak of Saxony (1933). King received an A from Booth for the earlier
version of this essay (see “A Comparison of the Theology of Luther with that of Calvin,” 26
May–5 July 1952, MLKP-MBU: Box 113) and a B+ for the course. King revised the essay for
DeWolf by omitting several paragraphs and making several additions; the passages that did not
appear in Booth’s version of the essay are noted here.

2. Williston Walker, John Calvin: The Organizer of Reformed Protestantism, 1509–1564 (New
York: G. P. Putnam, 1906), p. 409: “Within the brief compass allotted to this volume no ade-
quately comprehensive treatment can be given to so extensive a theme as Calvin’s theology; but
its salient features must at least be cursorily described.”
admit that they stood out as great leaders, notwithstanding their mistakes, in the historical movement which was moving toward individual responsibility and freedom of thought. The reformation was inevitable and certainly we cannot point to any single individual as being responsible for its coming. It was a development in the social order. But in all fairness, we must give some credit to the individual. The significance of the individual in such a period of history is that he stands in the midst of the ongoing social movement and gives it guidance and direction. Such credit must be given to men like Luther and Calvin.

The theology of these two great reformers and the great churches that sprang from them are quite different in temper and character. Philip Schaff, in his Creeds of Christendom, lists nine distinctions between the two. However, Schaff goes on, and rightly so, to emphasize the close affinity between these two men and the churches that owe their existence to them. Certainly when one scrutinizingly compares the writings of Luther and Calvin on great doctrinal questions he is immediately struck with the amazing similarities of the two, even more so than their disagreements. For example, we often distinguish between the two Reformers by saying that the regnant principle of Luther’s theology was justification by faith, while for Calvin it was the sovereignty of God. But this distinction is largely a matter of emphasis and ought not leave the impression that Luther did not speak of the sovereignty of God or that Calvin did not speak of justification by faith. For Luther, as for Calvin, God is the great sovereign power. For Calvin, as for Luther, justification by faith is the heart of the Christian faith. In other particulars, the affinity between the two Reformers is so close that it would be difficult to detect differences of any kind. They were

3. Hugh Thomson Kerr, Jr., ed., A Compend of Luther’s Theology (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1943), p. xii: “Something has already been said of the contrast that is often made between Luther and Calvin, and certainly the two Reformers as well as the great Churches that sprang from them are very different in temper and character. Philip Schaff, in his Creeds of Christendom, lists nine distinctions between the two. . . . Surely Schaff is right in emphasizing the close affinity between these two men and the Churches that owe their existence to them.”

4. On the earlier version of this essay, Booth wrote in the margin: “But what was faith? and in what? Faith for Luther is faith in an act done by God—Jesus on Cross—for me[,] Faith for Calvin is faith in the sovereignty, wisdom etc. of God. Faith in his love of Justice in predestination to heaven & hell. Trust God & accept his wisdom.”
at one in their scorn of the Roman Church; they were at one in their stand upon Scripture as the final authority for the faith; they were at one in emphasizing the evangelical doctrines of the Gospel. With these preliminary observations, we may now turn to a more detailed discussion of the theologies of Luther and Calvin.

God

Luther's view of God may be said to be threefold. First, for those outside of Christ, God is the great judge who passes penalty upon sinful men. He is the God of wrath, the stern judge who hates sin. Luther insisted that the very nature of God would be contradictory if he did not hate sin, therefore, his wrath is an inevitable corollary of his nature. But Luther does not stop here, he goes on to a second view of God, which to him is all important. For those in Christ, God is an all loving Father who is constantly revealing himself through his son Jesus Christ. Luther is well convinced that love is God's own proper work; wrath is his alien work. Actually, God does not want to be a wrathful God, but men with their sin make it so. Luther's view of a personal loving God grew primarily out of his experience. After his long struggle for salvation he came to peace because of his vision of the forgiving love of God in Christ. Moreover, Luther could not forget the advice of his

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5. Kerr, Luther's Theology, p. xiii: "In a comparison of the writings of Luther and Calvin on the great doctrinal questions what strikes one with greater force than their disagreements is the amazing similarity of the two, even to the point of detail in many instances. For example, so far as the authors themselves are concerned, there would seem to be little reason for distinguishing between them by saying that the regnant principle of Luther's theology was justification by faith, while for Calvin it was the sovereignty of God. If there is any truth in such a distinction, it is largely a matter of emphasis and ought not to leave the impression that Luther did not speak of the sovereignty of God or that Calvin did not treat of justification by faith. . . . For [Calvin], as for Luther, justification by faith is the heart of the Christian faith. . . . In other particulars the harmony between the two Reformers is so close that it would be difficult to detect differences of any kind. They were at one in their scorn of the Roman Church; they were at one in their refusal to be led into subtleties and verbal casuistry; they were at one in their stand upon Scripture as the Word of God and the final authority for faith; they were at one in emphasizing the evangelical doctrines of the Gospel."

6. Arthur Cushman McGiffert, Protestant Thought Before Kant (London: Duckworth, 1919), p. 29: "Peace came to him, after his long struggle to appease the wrath of God by meritorious works, solely because of his vision of the forgiving love of God in Christ."
teacher, Staupitz, who pointed out to him that true penitence began not with fear of a punishing God, but with love of God. In emphasizing this primacy of a God of love, Luther was well in line with the true Christian view of God. But amid all of this emphasis on a God of love, Luther sets forth a third view of God which complicates his whole theology. He comes forth saying that God is an absolute sovereign power who predestines some men to eternal salvation and others to eternal damnation. God is responsible for everything that happens. Man is denied of free will when it comes to choosing ultimates. He is free, but not free to choose the good. How man could have any freedom at all in the face of an absolute sovereign God is a question which Luther never answers. He goes on insisting that man is free in a limited sense, and yet God is still absolute sovereign.

Calvin's view of God is quite similar to that of Luther. The difference between the two is primarily a matter of emphasis rather than a matter of content. For Calvin, God is strictly a personal being whose omnipotence controls everything. Like Luther, he held that God is absolute sovereign. However, Calvin goes a little beyond Luther in his emphasis on this point. This is the major premise of Calvin's theology, and from it flows logically the rest of his views. If one accepts Calvin's premise, he must inevitably accept the remainder of his theology. According to Calvin everything that happens is decreed by God. Such things as being shipwrecked on a stormy sea, or being robbed, or being killed by the fall of a tree must be attributed to God as causal agency rather than to fate. God is forever exercising his will; he willed everything in the past, present and future. Of course, God wills nothing but the right. This is how Calvin accounted for the problem of evil. If God wills a thing it is right, for everything that he wills is determined by his glory and honor.

As a logical corollary of his major premise, Calvin posits a view of absolute predestination. Like Luther, Calvin insisted that some men are elected for salvation and others for damnation. But Calvin goes beyond Luther in emphasizing this point. According to Calvin, God not only foresaw "the fall of the first man

* Insti., I. xvi. 3.

7. This sentence does not appear in the earlier version of this essay.
or in him the ruin of his posterity, but arranged all by
the determination of His own will."** In other words,
God decreed the fall itself. This view is often spoken
of as supralapsarianism in contrast to infralapsarian-
ism, the view that God gave the decree of election af-

ter the fall of man.

From this brief summary, we can see a slight dif-

cence in Luther's view of God and Calvin's view of
God. The former, although recognizing the wrath
of God, placed emphasis on the love of God. Primar-
ily, God is an all loving father. On the other hand, it
is justice and power that are prominent in Calvin's
God. To the Reformed Theologian, though he rec-

gnized the love of God, the power and will of God
were fundamental. God the creator and ruler of the
world was the God of Calvin.9

The Person of Jesus

The genius of the Christian religion for Luther,
was to know God through Jesus Christ. Luther would
say that we do not know God through intellectual
speculation, nor through the mystic flight, but through
Jesus alone. He makes it clear that "man will not
find God outside of Christ, even should he mount up
above the heavens or descend below hell itself, or go
beyond the limits of the world."†

This Christocentric emphasis is a conspicuous part
of Luther's theology. When he comes to the person of
Jesus, Luther quite readily accepts the orthodox views
of the councils. With Nicaea he sees Jesus as "Very
God of Very God." With Chalcedon he sees Jesus as
fully human and fully divine. However, Luther went
beyond the councils by setting forth the views that the
human nature of Jesus absorbs the divine nature and
the divine nature of Jesus absorbs the human nature.
This view of Luther's is called communicatio ideo-
matum, "The communication of attributes." Through
the interchange of attributes, the divine nature of Je-


sus could experience birth, suffering and death, while
the human nature of Jesus could experience eternity,
onnipotence and ubiquity. It is probably that Luther

† Kerr, CLT, 49.

8. This sentence does not appear in the earlier version of this essay.

9. These two sentences do not appear in the earlier version of this essay.
posited this view in order to give logical validation to his view of consubstantiation.

Like Luther, Calvin accepts the orthodox views of the Church councils as to the person of Christ. In *The Institutes*, he states,

Choosing from the womb of the Virgin a temple for his residence, he who was the Son of God, became also the Son of man, not by a confusion of substance, but by a unity of person. For we assert such a connection and union of the Divinity with the humanity, that each nature retains its properties entire, and yet both together constitute one Christ.*

This immediately reveals that Calvin does not accept Luther's view of the *communicatio ideomatum*. He is quite convinced that "each nature retains its properties entire." Moreover, Calvin does not place as much emphasis on the revelation of God in Christ as does Luther. As stated above, Luther was insistant on the point that knowledge of God is only possible through Christ.

**Man and Human Nature**

When we turn to the reformer's view of man and human nature, we are immediately confronted with a stream of pessimism. First, we may turn to Luther. His view of man grows mainly out of two sources, viz., Augustinianism and his own personal experience. Luther became convinced with Augustine that God alone begins and ends the salvation process. There is no power in man's life to perform a saving good. Man's will is in moral bondage, leaving him free only to choose the evil. God alone has free will. Because of this, everything is from God to man. Man can never make a move toward God. Man, like a helpless creature in the bottom of a well, can do nothing until God reaches down and pulls him up.

Man finds himself in this condition because he misused his original freedom which resulted in the fall. After the fall, Adam's total nature was corrupted, and this corruption was passed on to all of his posterity. Luther's feeling of sinfullness in his own life convinced him of the logic of this view. He came to the conclusion that memory, understanding and will were totally corrupted by the fall. Before the fall, Adam was inclined only to the good. In this state of origi-
nal righteousness, man could know God, love God, and believe God, but the loss of original righteousness wrought man incapable of doing either of these. From this point on the human race became a mass of perdition.

With the exception of minor modifications, Calvin's view of man is well nigh identical with that of Luther. Like Luther, Calvin asserts that every man is evil from periphery to core and never can hope to be good unless God elects him to be so. The image of God, though not totally effaced from man, is in a terrible condition. Says Calvin: “Wherefore, although we allow that the divine image was not utterly annihilated and effaced in him, yet it was so corrupted that whatever remains is but horrible deformity.”

Guilt as well as corruption come to us from Adam. At birth, every man stands before God as a sinner. Calvin defines original sin as the “hereditary depravity and corruption of our own nature diffused through all the parts of the soul, rendering us obnoxious to the divine wrath.” With Luther, Calvin goes on to speak of the moral bondage of man's will. Says Calvin, “The will, therefore, is so bound by the slavery of sin, that it cannot excite itself, much less devote itself to anything good.” It is God, however, who wills the corruption of man. Every evil tendency in human nature is a decree by God. Even the fall itself was decreed by God. Luther never went to the extreme of Calvin at this point. He was content to see the fall as a result of man's free will. However, Calvin's conclusion at this point logically follows from his major premise.

Views of Salvation

Luther contended that salvation is of God alone, independent of all human effort. Following Paul, Luther maintained constantly that man is saved by faith and not by works. His position at this point is most emphatic and probably the most familiar part of his teaching. But is not salvation thus made dependent on man's efforts? Is not the substitution of “faith alone” for the traditional formula “faith and works” simply the substitution of one form of human merit for an-

10. These two sentences do not appear in the earlier version of this essay.
other? This would be true if faith were man's work, but according to Luther even faith is bestowed upon man by God. God produces it, and so it is not in any sense a form of human merit.*

Luther was thus a thoroughgoing predestinarian; this fact has been emphasized above. But Luther's predestinarianism was not a theological or metaphysical affair. It is true that in his desire to show the sole activity of God in the salvation process, he was led to present his predestinarian views in theological form, but this was not the essence of the matter. Luther's belief in predestination was the fruit of experience rather than the results of speculation. This is made clear, for an instance, by the fact that while he frequently speaks of the absolute bondage of the human will, and declares that all of our deeds are caused by God, he yet recognizes man's freedom in matters which do not concern salvation. Evidently Luther's primary concern was not to safeguard the divine omnipotence, but to give expression to his own experience of God's divine power in saving him. He had attempted to find salvation through meritorious work and this was to no avail, but finally he was able to gain peace because of his vision of the forgiving love of God in Christ. This convinced him that peace came to him through God's work, and not his. There could

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11. McGiffert, Protestant Thought, p. 28: "Though Luther believed, as I have already said, that salvation is of God alone, independent of all human effort, he yet taught that it is conditioned upon faith. Following Paul, who became here the interpreter of the reformer's own experience, he maintained constantly that man is saved by faith and not by works. His position at this point is the most familiar part of his teaching. But is not salvation thus made dependent after all upon human activity? Is not the substitution of 'faith alone' for the traditional formula 'faith and works' simply the substitution of one form of human merit for another? This would be so if faith were man's own work, but, according to Luther, it is the work of God. He produces it, and so it is not in any sense a form of human merit."

12. McGiffert, Protestant Thought, p. 29: "Luther was thus a thoroughgoing predestinarian; but his predestinarianism was not a theological or metaphysical affair. It is true that in his desire to do away with all human merit, and show the sole activity of God in the salvation of man, he was led to present his predestinarian convictions in theological form. ... But none of this is of the essence of the matter, and it should not be made the starting-point in interpreting his thought. His belief in predestination was the fruit of experience, not of speculation. This is made abundantly clear, for instance, by the fact that while he frequently asserts, in the most categorical fashion, the absolute bondage of the human will, and declares that all our deeds, evil as well as good, are directly caused by God, he yet recognizes man's freedom in matters which do not concern his salvation. Evidently his controlling interest was not to safeguard the divine omnipotence, but to give expression to his own experience of God's controlling power in saving him. Peace came to him, after his long struggle to appease the wrath of God by meritorious works, solely because of his vision of the forgiving love of God in Christ. The peace was God's work, not his own."
be no two agents in the salvation process. We may call this a monogistic view of salvation.

In dealing with Luther's view of salvation, we are inevitably led to a discussion of his view of the sacraments. It will be remembered that Luther reduced the sacraments to two in number, Baptism and the Lord's Supper. These sacraments could accomplish a deal of results in the lives of men, such as the forgiveness of sin, and the rendering of Grace, provided that the recipient was a believer. Luther could not accept the Roman Catholic view of ex opere operato (the view that the sacraments take effect in and of themselves without regards to the faith of the individual or the moral condition of the priest); instead he held the view of nullum sacramentum sine fide (no sacrament without faith). Luther would say that the sacraments depend basically on faith. If the recipient has not faith, the sacrament has no meaning.*

When he came to the interpretation of the Lord's Supper, Luther remained closer to Roman Catholicism than any of the other Reformers. To him Christ's words, “This is my body”, were literally true.13 “His deep religious feeling saw in an actual partaking of Christ the surest pledge of that union with Christ and forgiveness of sins of which the Supper was the divinely attested promise.”† However, Luther's interpretation of the Lord's supper is not identical with the Roman Catholic view. The view held by the latter is known as transubstantiation (trans-change; substantia-substance). Here it is held that the bread and the wine change into the substance of the body and blood of Christ. On the other hand, Luther held a view known as consubstantiation (con-with; substantio-substance). Here it is held that the body and blood of Christ are along with the bread and wine rather than the latter changing into the former. The question arises, how can a physical body be in more than one place? Luther sought to explain this mystery by a scholastic assertion, derived largely from Occam, that the qualities of Christ's divine nature, including ubiquity, were communicated to His human nature.14

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* Kerr, CLT, 164–170.
† Walker, HCC, 364.

13. Williston Walker, A History of the Christian Church (New York: Scribner, 1918), p. 364: “To Luther Christ's words, 'This is my body,' were literally true.”
14. Walker, History of the Christian Church, p. 364: “A physical body could be only in one place. . . . [Luther] sought to explain the physical presence of Christ on ten thousand altars at
When we come to Calvin's view of salvation, we immediately notice the affinity between his view and that of Luther. Calvin, like Luther posits the view that salvation is by God alone. Since God determines everything he determines salvation. Man's position in determining his salvation is manifestly nil. In a profound sense, Calvin's view of salvation grows out of his view of human nature. Spiritually, the natural man is as dead as a stone. The result is for Calvin a one way traffic.

Obviously Calvin's view of salvation is grounded in a thoroughgoing predestinarianism. It must be noticed, however, that Calvin, in his theory of predetermination was moved, not only by Luther's practical interest, but also by a theological motive which the Wittenberg reformer did not share, and he carried the theory further than Luther did, and gave it a more controlling place in his thinking. This doctrine for Calvin is a logical outgrowth of his view of the majesty and might of God. To reject or even to minimize predestination seemed to limit God and throw contempt upon him. Again, we are reminded of the fact that if we grant Calvin his premise, viz., the absolute sovereignty of God, then his conclusion that salvation depends totally on God is quite logical.

Calvin was quite as convinced as Luther that salvation is by faith alone. “Man,” he states, “being subject to the curse of the law, have no means left of attaining salvation but through faith alone.” Yet, the emphasis on the primacy of faith does not cause Calvin to minimize works, for he is convinced that

We never dream either of a faith destitute of good works, or of a justification unattended by them; this is the sole difference, that while we acknowledge a necessary connection between faith and good works, we attribute justification, not to works, but to faith.

Hence, faith is always accompanied by works. It seems at times that good works are stressed much more by Calvin than by Luther. The former seems to say trust

* Kerr, CCI, 108.
† Kerr, CCI, 115.

once by a scholastic assertion, derived largely from Occam, that the qualities of Christ's divine nature, including ubiquity, were communicated to His human nature.”

15. McGiffert, Protestant Thought, p. 87: “But Calvin gave [predestination] an essential place in a system whose controlling principle was the majesty and might of God. As a result to reject or even to minimize it seemed to limit God and throw contempt upon Him.”
Calvin's view of the significance of the eucharist or Lord's Supper is somewhat opposed to the view held by Luther. Luther had taught the Real Presence in the emblems while Zwingli had taken the diametrically opposite position and declared for the unalloyed symbolism of the holy meal. Calvin mediated these two positions with a leaning toward the Swiss reformer in form, and to the German in spirit. With Zwingli, he denied any physical presence of Christ; yet he asserts in the clearest terms a real, though spiritual presence received by faith. “Christ, out of the substance of His flesh, breathes life into our souls, nay, diffuses His own life unto us, though the real flesh of Christ does not enter us.”* Calvin stresses the view that the sacraments are only effective for the elect. The sacrament is a channel through which the divine grace enters the elect.

We cannot close this section without mentioning the two reformers' theory of atonement. It seems that Luther and Calvin were at one on this point. They shaped a theory of atonement with the analogies of criminal law. They agreed that the enormity of sin required an infinite satisfaction to God if he was to release the sinner.† This satisfaction that was due to God consisted in punishment. To meet this requirement Christ actually took the place of sinners in the sight of God, and as a substitute suffered the punishment that was due to men. Upon him fell all the punishment of all the sins of men for whom he died; against them, therefore, penal justice could have no further claim. Calvin continually emphasized the fact that this atonement was limited only to the elect. It seems that this whole theory of atonement grew out of the influence that legalistic training had had on these two reformers.

The Church

The reformer's doctrine of the Church was to a great extent an outgrowth of their overall theology. First of all, let us turn to Luther's view of the Church.

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* Calvin, *Insti.*, IV. xvii. 2.
† See Kerr, CCI, 88; Kerr, CLT, 52–53.
He speaks of the Church in a twofold manner. On the one hand, there is the visible Church which is an outward reality with action and clergymen. On the other hand, there is the invisible Church which is composed of all in spiritual fellowship with Christ. Says Luther:

For the sake of brevity and a better understanding, we shall call the two Churches by different names. The first which is the natural, essential, real and true one, let us call a spiritual, inner Christendom. The other, which is man-made and external, let us call a bodily, external Christendom; not as if we would part them asunder, but just as when I speak of a man, and call him, according to the soul, a spiritual, according to the body, a physical man; or as the Apostle is want to speak of the inner and of the outward man. Thus, also the Christian assembly, according to the soul, is a communion of one accord in one faith, although according to the body it cannot be assembled at one place, and yet every group is assembled in one place.*

* Kerr, CLT, 125-126.

It is quite possible, argues Luther, to be in the visible Church without being in the invisible Church. However, this assertion never caused Luther to think of the visible Church as being separated from the invisible Church; the two are together like body and soul. The invisible Church exists within the visible Church. Needless to say that Luther sees no earthly head of the Church. Christ alone is the head of the Church.

Calvin's doctrine of the Church is quite similar to that of Luther. According to Calvin the Church is the means by which we are nourished in the Christian life. "To those to whom God is a Father, the Church must also be a mother."† Following the line already marked out by Wyclif, Huss, and Zwingli, Calvin defines the Church as "all the elect of God, including in the number even those who have departed this life."‡ Like Luther, he sees the Church as both visible and invisible, and its marks are the word and the sacrament. Where the word is truly taught and the sacrament rightly administered there is the Church, and

† Insti., Iv. i. 1.
‡ Insti., Iv. i. 2.
outside of it there is no salvation. Calvin was very insistent upon this point. He says,

As our present design is to treat of the visible Church, we may learn even from the title mother, how useful and even necessary it is for us to know her, since there is no other way of entrance into life, unless we are conceived by her, born of her, nourished at her breast, and continually preserved under her care and government till we are divested of this mortal flesh, and become like Angels. . . . It is also to be remarked that out of her bosom there can be no hope of remission of sins, or any salvation.*

Whoever alienates himself from the Church is a “deserter of religion.” Yet to leave the Papacy is in no sense to leave the Church, for “it is certain that there is no Church where lying and falsehood have usurped the ascendancy”.†

The visible Church is properly governed only by officers of divine appointment made known in the New Testament. There are pastors, teachers, elders, and deacons,—partly clerical and partly lay office bearers, for in Calvin’s system the recognition of the rights of the laymen, characteristic of the whole Reformation movement, comes to its completest development. This recognition received further illustration in that the officers of the Calvinistic Churches, unlike those of the Roman, Lutheran, and Anglican communions, enter their charges only by the consent of the people whom they serve. Their call is twofold,—the secret inclination which has God as its author, and the election “on the consent and approbation of the people.”‡

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18. McGiffert, Protestant Thought, pp. 93–94: “But the Church is visible as well as invisible, and its marks are the word and the sacraments. Where the word is truly taught and the sacraments rightly administered there is the Church, and outside of its pale there is ordinarily no salvation. Calvin was very insistent upon this point. ‘What God has joined together,’ he says, ‘it is wrong to put asunder; for to those to whom God is a Father the Church also is a mother.’ And again: ‘As our present design is to treat of the visible Church, we may learn even from the title of mother how useful and even necessary it is for us to know her, since there is no other way of entrance into life unless we are conceived by her, born of her, nourished at her breast, and continually preserved under her care and government till we are divested of this mortal flesh and become like the angels. . . . It is also to be remarked that out of her bosom there can be no hope of remission of sins nor any salvation.’”

19. Walker, Calvin, p. 419: “Whoever alienates himself from it is a ‘deserter of religion.’ Yet to leave the Papacy is in no sense to leave the Church, for ‘it is certain that there is no Church where lying and falsehood have usurped the ascendancy.’”

20. Walker, Calvin, pp. 419–420: “This visible Church is properly governed only by officers of divine appointment made known in the New Testament. These are pastors, teachers, elders,
This, in brief, is the doctrine of the Church held by Luther and Calvin. Although they consider the Church important and even necessary, they never give it the authoritarian position that it held in Roman Catholicism. It was Christ that was supreme for them, not the Church or the Pope.

The Scripture

A survey of the theology of Luther and Calvin would be quite inadequate without a discussion of their views of the Bible. Certainly most of the Reformers were united in seeing the scripture as the absolute word of God. In speaking of scripture as the absolute word of God, Luther could say,

We must make a great difference between God's word and the word of man. A man's word is a little sound, that flies into the air, and soon vanishes; but the Word of God is greater than heaven and earth, yea, greater than death and hell, for it forms part of the power of God, and endures everlastingly; we should, therefore, diligently study God's Word, and know and assuredly believe that God himself speaks unto us.*

Calvin could say that “we are not established in the belief of the Bible till we are indubitably persuaded that God is its Author.”† Calvin was convinced that the Scriptures were written by men who were “sure and authentic amanuenses of the Holy Spirit.”‡ In brief, both Calvin and Luther merely substituted the authority of Scripture for that of Church and Pope. But in their respective doctrines of Scripture, when fully developed, Calvin was for more narrow the Luther. The latter's teaching may be summed up thus: All teaching not found to contradict scripture may be true, while the former (Calvin) would say, all teaching not found in the Scripture is false. For the German the Scriptures were a partial revelation of truth while

* Kerr, CLT, 10.

† Insti., I. vii. 4.

‡ Insti., I. vi. 2.
for the Frenchmen the Scriptures were an unabridged compendium of all truth. The one gave opportunity for a living God while the other embalmed Him and mummified him in the pages of the book.

**Critique**

The leading ideas of Luther's and Calvin's theology have been presented in the preceding paragraphs: it remains for us, in this closing section, to indicate the main lines of criticism which they have called forth in my mind.

First, let us turn to their doctrine of God. It will be remembered that both Luther and Calvin placed a great deal of emphasis on the sovereignty of God. But there is always the danger that an undue emphasis on the sovereignty of God will lose sight of the divine love. God is first and foremost an all loving Father, and any theology which fails to recognize this, in an attempt to maintain the sovereignty of God, is betraying everything that is best in the Christian tradition. Luther dimly recognized this, and attempted, although often unsatisfactorily, to stress the love of God. But not so with Calvin. It is justice and power that are prominent in Calvin's God. The God of the Genevan reformer was a monster of iniquity. He was so bent on justice that he possessed no conscience. He was so concerned about being respected and glorified that He found in Himself neither glory nor respect for men. When men become servants of such a God, they may be expected to set flame to the faggots piled high about the body of a Servetus or preach the sermon of Jonathan Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God."^{21}

We may now turn to a criticism of the reformer's views of the person and work of Christ. Concerning the Person of Christ, both Luther and Calvin affirmed the traditional Two-Nature Doctrine. Both were convinced that a perfect, divine, and a perfect human nature were united in the personality of Christ. This doctrine, however, calls for a reinterpretation and modification. It was based on a Platonic substance philosophy which has been largely replaced

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21. The remainder of the essay does not appear in the previous version.
today by a philosophy which see reality as active or
dynamic on the one hand and as individual and con-
crete on the other. On the basis of such thinking it
is a mistake to look upon Christ as having two inde-
pendently existing natures. As Knudson has so well
put it,

There were factors in his personality that may be dis-
tinguished as human and divine. But they were not
distinct substances. They were simply different as-
pects of the one unique personality. And this person-
ality is to be viewed, not as a substance, but as an
agent.*

Hence, we must affirm that Christ is a unitary per-
sonality, and this unity we find in his own ego. There
is nothing in rational speculation nor New Testament
thought to warrant the view that Jesus had two per-
sonal centers. We must then think of Christ as a uni-
tary being whose divinity consists not in any second
nature or in a substantial unity with God, but in a
unique and potent God consciousness. His unity of
{with} God was a unity of purpose rather than a unity
of substance.

Concerning the work of Christ the two reformers
stressed a substitutionary theory of atonement. They
maintained that Christ actually took the place of sin-
ers in the sight of God, and as a substitutee suffered
the punishment that was due to men. But all of this is
based on a false view of personality. Merit and guilt
are not transferable from one person to another. They
are inalienable from personality. Moreover, on moral
grounds, a person cannot be punished in the place of
another.23

Another weakness in this theory of atonement is
that it is based on the assumption that the chief ob-
stacle to man's redemption is in the nature of God.
But there was never any obstacle to man's redemption
in God himself. The real obstacle to man's redeem-
ction has always lain in man himself. It is from this
standpoint, therefore, that the death of Christ is to

* Knudson, BICT, 137.

Press, n.d.), p. 137: "It is therefore a mistake to think of Christ as having two independently
existing natures."

23. Knudson, Basic Issues, p. 144: "All this taken literally is fictitious. Merit and guilt are inal-
ienable from personality. They cannot be detached from one person and transferred to another.
Nor can one person morally be punished in place of another."
be interpreted. Christ's death was not a ransom, or a penal substitute, or a penal example, rather it was a revelation of the sacrificial love of God intended to awaken an answering love in the hearts of men.

Another phase of thinking in which our two theologians went to an extreme was in the doctrine of man. Both affirm that man was originally righteous, but through some strange and striking accident he became hopelessly sinful. Yet it has become increasingly difficult to imagine any such original state of perfection for man as Luther and Calvin continually presupposed. It is not within the scope of this paper to enter into any argument concerning evolution. However, it is perfectly evident that its major contentions would refute such a view. We are compelled, therefore, to reject the idea of a catastrophic fall and regard man's moral condition from another point of view. Man's fall is not due to some falling away from an original righteousness, but to a failure to rise to a higher level of his present existence.

In the same view we must reject Luther's and Calvin's view that man is incapable of performing any saving good, and that man can do nothing to save himself. Certainly we must agree that the image of God is terribly scared in man, but not to the degree that man cannot move toward God. As seen in the life and teaching of Jesus, humanity remains conscious of its humble dependence upon God, as the source of all being and all goodness. “There is none good save one, even God.” Yet in dealing with even the worst of men, Christ constantly made appeal to a hidden goodness in their nature. We must somehow believe that the lives of men are changed when the potential good in man is believed in particularly, and when the potential bad in man is sought to be overwhelmed.

A final doctrine of Luther and Calvin which needs to be criticized is the doctrine of predestination. Any form of mechanical determinism is far from adequate for lasting Christian doctrine. The Kantian “I ought therefore I can” should stand out as a prelude in any Christian conception of man. Any attempt to maintain a doctrine of man denied (devoid) of freedom

24 DeWolf commented in the margin, “But note that the original innocence could not be refuted.”
leads us into needless paradoxes. How can there be responsibility with no freedom? Indeed, how can there be reason with no freedom? Freedom is both a moral and metaphysical necessity. In the final analysis any denial of freedom is an affirmation of it since its denial presupposes a decision for what appears true over against what appears false.

In spite of these somewhat severe criticisms of Luther and Calvin we must not in the least minimize the importance of their message. Their cry does call attention to the desperateness of the human situation. They do insist that religion begins with God and that man cannot have faith apart from him. They do proclaim that apart from God our human efforts turn to ashes and our sunrises into darkest night. Much of this is good, and may it not be that its re-emphasised by the neo-orthodox theologians of our day will serve as a necessary corrective for a liberalism that at times becomes all to shallow?25

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